

VZCZCXRO1826
PP RUEHCHI RUEHDT RUEHHM RUEHNH
DE RUEHBK #0486 0561056
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 251056Z FEB 09
FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6162
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 6802
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 9459
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 5501
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL PRIORITY 5294
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 1410
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON PRIORITY 2621
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI PRIORITY 6204
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/CJCS WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 000486

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP, DRL, IO; NSC FOR PHU

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/25/2019

TAGS: [PGOV PHUM TH](#)

SUBJECT: THAI PROTEST UPDATE: REDSHIRTS RALLY AT GOVERNMENT
HOUSE, NUMBERS FAIL TO IMPRESS

Classified By: Classified By: Political Counselor George Kent, reason 1
.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (SBU) As many as 10,000 anti-government protesters loyal to former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, also known as "Redshirts", continued to protest at Government House on February 25. The Redshirts began their protest on February 24, when a group of 10,000 to 15,000 marched to the Government House compound and set up camp overnight. Their agenda included calling for leaders of the People's Alliance of Democracy (PAD) to be held accountable for the December 2008 occupation of Bangkok's airports; the resignation of FM Kasit Piromya; and amendment of the 2007 constitution.

¶2. (SBU) Embassy observers noted the crowd appeared sincerely enthusiastic, police around Government House appeared prepared and properly restrained, and Army troops had a large, visible presence inside the Government House compound. The Redshirts vowed to block all roads around the Government House until the House dissolved. Nevertheless, on February 25, Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva, with police protection, took advantage of an early morning decrease in Redshirt numbers to enter the Government House compound with Deputy Prime Minister Suthep Thangsuban to conduct business as usual amid preparations for the ASEAN Summit. The Redshirts later staged a rally of around 100 protesters at the Foreign Ministry in the afternoon of February 25 to demand the resignation of FM Kasit, who had publicly supported PAD demonstrations prior to his cabinet appointment.

¶3. (SBU) Rally organizer Natthawut Saikua told the press on February 25 that the Redshirts would fight for democratic rule and remain active even without Thaksin as a political player. However, protest numbers have not reached initial estimations of between 20,000 and 30,000 supporters. From the highest estimate of 15,000, the crowd dropped to 8000 by 5 pm February 24 and much lower overnight. The Metropolitan Police Bureau's Operation Center told us that numbers hovered between 1,000 and 2,000 on February 25. The rapidly dwindling numbers may have been due to high temperatures and difficulty in providing food and water. (Note: By contrast, the six-month long protest movement orchestrated by the PAD included fully functioning kitchens, alongside other amenities such as barbers and medical care. End Note.)

14. (C) Comment: The December 2008 decision by Buriram politician Newin Chidchob to switch allegiance of the "Friends of Newin" MP faction from Thaksin to join the cabinet led by former Democrat Party adversary Abhisit left many wondering about the future organizational capability of the Redshirt movement. Newin has a mass following in the lower northeast and a proven track record of being able to turn out supporters on the streets. In the second half of 2008, he appeared to be one of the primary organizers of Redshirt protests. Former Thai Rak Thai Acting Party Leader Chaturong Chaiseng told us on February 20 that the defection of Newin caused an organizational challenge for the remaining redshirt leaders and contributed to lower attendance at subsequent rallies. Still, the Redshirt movement does represent something beyond merely a pro-Thaksin street presence; as Redshirt leader Vira Musikapong told us in late January, "the Democrats, the military, and parts of the monarchy ignore that reality at their own peril."

JOHN